

Origin and development of pastoralism in the Mediterranean area: the case of Vallone Inferno, Scillato (Palermo), Sicily.

Since the work of Brochier, Villa & Giacomarra (*Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1992) the use of caves and rock shelters, for pastoral purpose, in this area of Sicily since antiquity, has been attested, but the attention of the mentioned study focused mainly on recent and subrecent deposits and the lack of an archaeological record within the sites presented, reduces the impact of it, with respect to our investigation, despite an accurate sedimentological analysis. Today we want to present and discuss the results of an interdisciplinary investigation of a site that, up to date, is the first pastoral settlement of the area covering the entire history of pastoralism development, from Neolithic to modern age (with some gap, of course) in one of the main Mediterranean islands: Sicily. Our research documents the born and the development of pastoralism from different point of view: chronological, technical and cultural.

We are documenting the interest for a mountain range, dating back to Neolithic until present. The site shows a stratigraphy that embraces the whole Holocene. The deposit was covered by a subactual level of use, with a modern pastoral pen and goes back to Neolithic, crossing medieval, late roman, middle and early Bronze age levels.

Up to date, actually, Vallone Inferno rock shelter and the Neolithic “tricromica” painted pottery found here represent the first stage of a constant and uninterrupted mountain exploitation (mainly for pastoral purpose, we suggest) opening this extreme range to human peopling from all over the region, until modern age. Even if the rock shelter is sited in a mountainous context, the place is opened directly on one of the main fluvial valley of the Island – the Himera river valley, connecting, with the Southern Himera river, the Northern coast of Sicily to the inner and Southern part of the region.

This geographical feature and the altitude reached by these mountains, the only real mountains (except Mt. Etna) of the Island, are the more probable explanations for the presence in the site of cultural element coming from all over Sicily, especially during recent prehistory (final Copper age – early Bronze age), when the pastoral activity probably involved both horizontal (North-South and East-West) and vertical (from valley to the top of the mountains) shifts of livestock. Our speech aims to show a detailed report of an interdisciplinary analysis, mainly of levels of Bronze age, as knew by the ongoing excavation, with particular attention to the dynamics of formation of the archaeological deposit and to the technical choices linked to the pastoral activity we can interpret by data of anthropic and natural derivation, originating by different chrono-cultural stages we are able to distinguish. Vallone Inferno rockshelter is a rare place where herding activity and its socio-cultural features can be seen in their evolution from the first stage of Holocene until contemporary days, that’s a unique chance! Our attention will be focused on seasonality of the site (suggested from analysis of carpological remains), cultural provenance of herding groups (with some implication for regional culture and economy development), technical choices resulting by intra-site spatial analysis at a diachronic level of investigation, especially of pens and areas or levels of burnt manure.